

Mister Mayor and Bitou Council, what's blocking the Lookout Nature Reserve resolution?

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LOOKOUT ROCKS:
The green space and rocks sticking out into the sea - between Lookout Deck and The Wedge Beach, and in front of The Plettenberg Hotel - indicate the area of the proposed nature reserve that has been in the pipeline since 1999



MOST people in Plett know the area around Lookout Rocks - a beautiful though neglected and heavily trampled stretch of fynbos, forest, wetland and rock, roughly between Lookout Deck and The Wedge Beach, and in front of The Plettenberg Hotel. The latter area is notorious these days for crime and vagrants sleeping in the bush, since local authorities simply ignore the area. Fewer people know that much effort and money has been spent by residents over the past 20 years to have the area declared as nature reserve and get it properly managed. The only thing standing in the way has been bureaucratic indifference on the side of Bitou Municipality. What would be the benefits of declaring this a nature reserve?

- This beautiful spot can be transformed into a major asset

for tourism in Plett.

- Criminal activity in the area can be controlled.
- A large amount of money tied up in trust funds can be released to be used for the improvement of Bitou's disadvantaged schools.
- A key area of natural beauty can be preserved for future generations, by erecting boardwalks, stopping erosion and pollution, putting up signs, etc.

So, what's the story?

In 1998, a private developer tried to buy the two portions of land in the area directly from the Department of Public Works in Cape Town without consulting the local authority or public, with a view to creating a private development on the site. Affected landowners, the public, and the municipality rallied together to protect this popular recreational area, unique natu-

ral asset and tourism attraction from private development. After wide consultation, it was agreed that the land must be protected by declaring it a nature reserve for conservation purposes, providing a natural recreational area and tourist attraction for present and future generations. In exchange, surrounding landowners pledged R1.6-million to a bona fide community trust upon declaration of the nature reserve. Unbelievably, 20 years later that trust money is still gathering interest at a law firm that may not release these sorely-needed funds for the poor people of Bitou until this reserve is declared.

Time lines

In 1999, the municipality and national Department of Public Works, as well as the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, approved the project in principle.

In 2001, Environment minister Valli Moosa visited the area himself and asked then mayor Euan Wildeman to apply for local authority nature reserve status. Although the mayor responded positively, the process was stalled by discussions about who would supply the money, how the community could in practice benefit, etc. Funds were, by general consent and on the initiative of the mayor and Jeremy Ratcliffe of the Nelson Mandela Fund, eventually earmarked for use by the Bitou 10 Education and Development Fund that has been helping disadvantaged schools in Bitou. Independent environmental agency bluepebble was appointed to draw up an integrated management plan. Their very detailed report including budgets

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